DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 916 RC 017 615

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TITLE Bridging the Gap: Counselling Strategies in a Cross-Cultural Context.
PUB DATE Oct 89
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the National Symposium on Aboriginal Women of Canada (Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, October 19-21, 1989).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indians; Counseling; *Counseling Effectiveness; Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Attitudes; Counselor Characteristics; Counselor Client Relationship; *Cultural Awareness; Cultural Differences; Culture Conflict; Females; Foreign Countries; Social Values; *Values
IDENTIFIERS Canada

ABSTRACT

Cultural awareness enlarges the world view of traditional counseling methodologies that teach that the dominant society's values are the healthy norms to use in assessing and assisting ethnic groups. A dominant society counselor or therapist can be more effective in helping members of other groups by utilizing self-awareness and developing a degree of understanding of and respect for the client's cultural environment and perceptual framework. Values and beliefs of various native groups are different, just as a sharp distinction within the dominant culture exists between urban and rural lifestyles and values. Understanding the major Pan-Indian values in relationship to equivalent contemporary dominant values will enable the counselor to delineate potential problem areas within the framework of a culture clash. Indian values that vary from the values of the dominant culture are: (1) harmony and balance in self-perception and unity of mind-body-thinking-feeling-spiritual beliefs; (2) harmony and balance in perception of the world, belongingness with nature; (3) present orientation, working for present needs; (4) cooperation; (5) sharing; (6) respect for age; (7) stoicism, outer control; (8) humility, humor at self; and (9) clearly defined sex roles. This paper provides detailed advice on counseling Native Americans based on the author's personal experience in cross-cultural therapy. (ALL)

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"BRIDGING THE GAP" -- Counselling Strategies in a "Cross-Cultural Context"

by

Joan D. Wierzba, M.S.W., R.S.W.

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"BRIDGING THE GAP -- Counselling Strategies in a "Cross-Cultural Context"

Joan D. Wierzba, M.S.W., R.S.W.

I - I N T R O D U C T I O N

Cross-cultural counselling has been perceived as a viable aspect of counselling with a specialized body of knowledge since the emergence of ethnic awareness in the 1960's and 1970's in the United States.

Just as the feminist movement altered male-oriented theories of development, so does cultural awareness enlarge the world view of traditional methodologies which teach us that the dominant society's values are the "healthy" norms to use in assessing and assisting our clients.

If we define "culture" as Smith and Vasquez do in Counselling Psychology's special issue devoted to cross-cultural counselling, it is a system of "shared values, shared perceptions of reality, and shared symbols that people have by which their thinking and interpersonal relationships are conducted." (Smith and Vasquez, 1985, p. 532).

Clearly then, each of us who sets out to help others must first have a clear idea of who we are, what values and belief systems are intrinsic to our own identity, before we can effectively deal with others' diverse belief systems. Katz (1985, p. 622) reminds us that counselling is "neither value free nor disconnected from social, political and historical realities." We are each the product of our culture and our unique life experiences, which create our way of perceiving and dealing with the world both inside and outside of us.

Therefore a beginning in culturally sensitive counselling entails self-awareness: what are my personality dynamics, how do I perceive other cultures, what stereotypes do I have about my own group as well as others. As Ibrahim (1985, p. 635) states, "It is essential to understand our own cultural heritage and world view before we set about understanding and assisting other people."

A counsellor/therapist who is a member of the dominant society can be most effective in helping members of other groups by utilizing self-awareness and developing a degree of understanding of, and respect for, the client's own cultural environment and perceptual framework.

II - P O P U L A T I O N

At this point, I would like to briefly discuss the major groups which make up the native population of the city and the university in Lethbridge, Alberta, which provide rich opportunity for cross-cultural experiences. Lethbridge, the location of the University of Lethbridge, is adjacent to the largest Indian reserve in Canada, the Blood Reserve, where approximately 6,000 natives reside. Nearby is the Peigan Reserve of approximately 1500. Both are part of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

City government statistics estimate that the 3,000 native residents (5% of the population) are predominantly "local" Blackfoot-speaking people with smaller numbers of Cree, and even smaller representation from Ojibway, Sioux and other groups.

Estimates of numbers of native students at the university are harder to come by. Since students are not statistically identified by race or ethnic group, the broad and "unscientific" guess of 150 students is based upon recognizable native names of registered students. It is likely that more than 150 are in attendance, although a more precise number would be difficult to assess. Again, most are from the local Blackfoot-speaking groups, but representation is present from all parts of Canada and all major aboriginal groups including Inuit.

III - V A L U E S Y S T E M S

As I discuss value systems, it is of note that the tremendous range of native cultures provides a range of values and beliefs as well. There is no "typical" Indian. Some of what I say will likely contradict the experience and beliefs of some groups. Remember too that there is a sharp distinction even within the dominant culture between urban and rural lifestyles and values. Much of what is to follow as "native" values can also hold true of the rural system. Further confusing the issue is the fact that there is no "typical" member of the dominant society, either. We are all a combination, a "mixed bag" of beliefs.

With this in mind, I would like now to briefly list the major Pan-Indian values which are held by traditional native people, as adapted from Trimble (1981, pp. 203-209). Even though these generalizations will violate the unique individuality of some groups or tribes in some specific cultural beliefs or behaviour patterns, a broad system is helpful in terms of understanding generalized intertribal cultural beliefs. Also, juxtaposed with a list of the "equivalent" or contrasting values of the dominant society, potential problem areas can be clearly delineated within the framework of a culture clash.

Traditional Pan-Indian Values	Contemporary Dominant Values
Holism: harmony & balance in self-perception: unity of mind-body-thinking-feeling-spiritual beliefs	Separation of mind-body, of thinking-feeling, of religion, from daily life
Holism: harmony & balance in perception of the world, belongingness with nature	Separation in perception of the world: mastery of nature, man at top of nature's hierarchy
Present orientation, working for present needs	Future orientation, working to get ahead
Cooperation	Competition
Sharing	Saving for oneself
Respect for age	Emphasis on youth

Stoicism, outer control	Assertiveness, aggression
Humility, humour at self	Self-importance
Clearly defined sex roles	Role diffusion

IV - VALUES AND THE STUDENT ROLE

A traditional native person's holistic view of the world and of his/her being is profoundly different from the world view and self-perception of typical North Americans of the dominant society.

The "typical" student can compartmentalize his/her life successfully enough to make the transition from worker to student, or wife to student, or high school student to college or university student. (S)he will identify academic success as a goal-oriented, fairly immediate priority, and will follow time management schedules that are designed to maximize the value of time spent in class and studying. This type of planning is a prerequisite for academic success, which is recognized to be an ongoing competitive selection process with emphasis placed on high grades. To attain success, much time and energy must be expended in the "student" role. At times of exam preparation or when papers are due, it may dominate the identity and lifestyle of the student, taking precedence over other roles and identifications. Being a child (a student living in the home of parents) or a spouse or mother becomes, at least temporarily, secondary. Former occupational roles recede into memory. To the question, "Who are you?", many respond, "I am a student."

Ask a traditional native person the same question and (s)he may very well reply, "I am an Indian", or similar term of reference. To be an Indian means to belong to an ancient and complex system which is indivisible: to be a parent, a child, a relative, a clan member, a tribe member. To belong to and be part of the oneness of the earth, the sky, and everything in between them. The implications are profound in terms of how native people perceive their presence on this earth.

Martin Heavy Head (1989) points out an interesting aspect of the holistic perception of self. He states that natives are much less likely than others to experience a retirement crisis. For them, retirement is the loss of a job rather than the loss of an identity.

To be a native and a student is not necessarily a simple task. It means functioning (often in a second language) in a strange environment, even for the minority of natives who are already city dwellers. It means learning the rules of the "academic game" as played by unfamiliar and sometimes hostile players, frequently in isolation as the only native in the class.

For local natives, it means leaving the university buildings after classes, to return to the reserve and the more familiar frames of reference of native life. It means "to retreat for more sustenance", as one young student verbalized.

For natives from far-away reserves, it means feeling like a tree uprooted, reaching through cement and searching for fresh earth around it to support its life.

To establish the student role as a priority means that the traditional native must put aside to some degree responsibilities and obligations which are deeply rooted and complex. To do this can entail conflict, with feelings of guilt and selfishness for placing one's needs ahead of the general good.

Cooperation and harmony are highly valued, and if one expresses a need to be alone to study or to meet with fellow students to prepare a report (instead of preparing food and keeping company with the relatives who have dropped by), guilt may lurk just beneath the surface, with a gnawing feeling of selfishness for pursuing a goal which requires putting one's needs first and therefore inconveniencing many other people.

In the case of a native wife/mother whose spouse is ambivalent about her academic pursuits, many "crises" can arise where her presence is "indispensable", too often forcing a choice between family and school work. When the wife/student already experiences self-doubts or insecurity, the situation is virtually guaranteed to perdict academic failure or dropping out.

In an atmosphere of committed support by the spouse and extended family members, the student can direct his/her energies to academic work because conflicts and guilt are minimized. Where the student operates in a vacuum lacking this support and receives little encouragement from non-student peers on the reserve (who are more likely to devalue the student's school attendance), problems are likely to arise.

When a student gives in to family or peer pressure to put aside schoolwork and subsequently fails, it is easier for the student to internalize the feelings of failure than to perceive the reason for the failure as a lack of support and direction.

Making hard decisions about lifestyle changes is necessary for academic success. To see these decisions as a positive statement of self-worth rather than as selfishness is a difficult task, but one which is necessary for academic survival.

An interesting example of holistic perception appears at times in the reaction of traditional native students to written English assignments. Kate Chiste, Lecturer in the School of Management at the University of Lethbridge, cites examples of conflict in natives over writing assignments that non-natives take for granted (Chiste, 1989). Because of deep respect for the word, which symbolizes wisdom and the morality of language, a very traditional native feels guilt at stealing someone else's ideas if (s)he writes a research-oriented paper citing quotes and references.

Similarly, a "fact" cannot be written if it is untrue. Therefore, a "simple" creative writing assignment like a fictitious press release can be a source of discomfort: how can one write about something that does not exist?!

When these conflicts are understood and taken into consideration, a brief explanation of the purpose of the assignment and the reasoning processes of the dominant culture suffice to put the conflicts at rest. Encouragement and validation for trying something different can transform a difficult and confusing assignment into positive learning.

In a similar vein, the use of symbols and imagery may have more impact on a native. To quote Romero, "Understanding imagery and nuances conveyed by ethnic language styles is essential to meaningful communication" (1985, p. 668). A classroom creative assignment using vivid imagery may evoke a powerful emotional response, which can be unsettling to the instructor and embarrassing to the students if they are unprepared for it. In an atmosphere of trust and understanding, such an experience shared by students and teacher alike binds the class together in a positive way.

Finally, a "superficial" assignment to write about an event or a feeling may evoke a painful, raw narrative. 1,000 words on "What I did last summer" may evoke 1,000 words on physical abuse, abandonment or rape: clearly not an enjoyable assignment to write or to read. Again, more detailed and specific information about what is expected can prevent this.

Moving on, another potential problem area in values differences is the aspect of time. Cliche-ridden though this topic is, a reserve life-style does place a very different pace on life (for many reasons) than an urban clock. Yet to survive academically, one must function in a future oriented mode with an internalized semester clock ticking away through daily routines, with the alarm going off before papers and exams.

With preparation in basic time management skills, the native student can survive in both worlds. The key survival skill is organization: for scheduling future academic events and preparing for them in advance, in a regular study routine; and building in time for the ongoing complex and satisfying aspects of family and reserve life. Again, family cooperation is crucial for success.

Not unexpectedly, the clearly defined sex roles of native life can also present problems. Academic learning is not valued for men in a society where practical skills provide the minimal employment opportunities available, and athletic skills provide a sense of mastery and competence.

Traditionally, native men were hunters stalking game in a landscape fraught with danger. With a shift in perception, a contemporary warrior could be one who stalks grades in the academic world to gain mastery in the dominant society. To achieve this perceptual shift and gain in social prestige, graduates need to role model a new form of success.

A reservation in Montana follows the custom of having warriors' banquets when the athletic teams return successful from tournaments. Perhaps this public honoring could also occur when students return to the reserve after the completion of the semester.

Women are perceived as nurturers linked to the system around them which they support, whether nuclear or extended family, or friends who drop by to visit the husband. To selectively choose not to fulfill these obligations and to instead fulfill academic tasks is a decision laden with heavy consequences for the adult woman student. Community pressure is brought to bear on her to not be "selfish" and to tend to academics only after all her other obligations are fulfilled. It is to the credit of native women that many of them recognize education as the route to a better future for their family, and find the courage to live their lives accordingly.

Thus here at the University of Lethbridge for example, where the number of female native students is about twice the number of males, they support each other in their endeavors.

If we move on to another value that Trimble considers Pan-Indian, stoicism, we come to a controversial issues. Perhaps stoicism <u>is</u> a characteristic of some native people; arguments about needing to accept difficult situations and adapt to them through centuries are quite convincing. However, when I think of the native people I've known in many contexts (predominantly Blackfoot but some others as well), I see much expressiveness and hear much. Joy, laughter, tears, muttering and complaining, pain, rage: spontaneous feelings expressed freely are not stoicism.

For the few native people I encounter who are not expressive, I believe there is a contemporary psychodynamic explanation: reactivity. Years of profound oppression have developed a maladaptive coping method, one of deep helplessness and chronic passivity. An apparent emptiness of expression, like the apparent emptiness of the chronically abused wife, indicates a bleak, almost-conquered existence in which the flame of life is just a glimmer. I say "almost" because (as with the chronically-abused wife) with treatment the spirit rekindles.

The feeling of giving up, of near-despair, is a manifestation of internalized anger. It is "easier" to hate the self for being "no good" and a failure than it is to rage at an impersonal and large scale social system of discrimination. The "easier" route of self-hatred results in the high level of suicide, accidents and drug and alcohol-related problems of the native populace.

Last, many natives (especially youth) are torn between two worlds. They desire the consumer goods and signs of success of the dominant culture, yet the route through education, employment, and urban sophistication is full of roadblocks that white males rarely have to face. Few in number are the natives who have education <u>and</u> a good job <u>and</u> a good home in an accepting neighborhood for their children.

One young couple reported driving their new car and being stopped by police to check the car ownership--a humiliation which would not likely be experienced by a young white couple. "Small" incidents like this can have a cumulative, devastating impact on the self-concept, and on the perception of the outside world!

Further, in a reserve setting, to be educated can lead to two problems. Unrealistic expectations can be placed on the returning student because (s)he has been to the "Big School." Older natives with little formal education may expect the student/graduate to understand tax forms, legal documents and other specialized information that the student had no exposure to in school--and may consider the student selfish or uncooperative for not helping out.

On the other hand, returning graduates are sometimes rejected by their reserve for being too "white." The "ghetto mentality" which operates on many reserves will try to tear down the positive identity of the student/graduate and view him/her with jealousy, suspicion, and critical gossip. In the words of one recent graduate struggling with this rejection, "Misery loves company."

A profound aspect of being native in a non-native society is a deep anxiety. On the reserve people can relax and feel comfortable. In the city, non-natives are always observing, judging and, all too often, acting hurtfully. To go into a supermarket, to buy a newspaper, to order a cup of coffee in a restaurant, to stop the car at a traffic light--every aspect of life is potentially problematic. An almost-unnoticed but pervasive anxiety becomes part of city living. One native women I know went to school far away where no one bothered to notice that she was native. She felt free of that anxiety for the first time in her life. Another woman went to Yugoslavia and described the poeple there as "like natives, I felt comfortable with them." What she didn't say by omissions was a very powerful statement.

V - COUNSELLING NATIVE STUDENTS

Why would a native see a non-native counsellor? Most of the time, there is no choice. The people in power are almost always non-native. So when seeking a school counsellor or agency help, almost all staff are non-native.

Several native clients have stated a preference for seeking help off-reserve in the non-native system because they fear lack of confidentiality on the reserve. They fear that their private issues will become public gossip in a setting where many people are related by blood or marriage and feel family loyalties and alliances. They choose to trust a non-native stranger instead, knowing that their business will remain in that room and separate from reserve life.

Work of mouth referrals will come via present and former clients who developed a high level of trust and comfort with the counselling process and the counsellor.

How does the non-native counsellor approach work with the native client/student? The initial contact is important, as first impressions affect the level of trust in a building relationship. Even if you are a casual person, be prepared to shake hands at the introduction. The slower-paced social niceties were well learned by native people and they often maintain that politeness while we have skipped into casualness. They learned well from their teachers!

More than with most clients, it helps to make the native person feel welcome. As you will be perceived as a symbol of authority, it helps to take the time to encourage the client to feel comfortable, perhaps offering to hang up his/her coat, offering coffee, smiling (if this is genuine) and treating the person like a guest. If you have food present, offer to share it. If there is a box of donuts or a cake in the coffee room, offering the food is a process of inclusion. This helps to level the relationship, to reverse the impression of an impersonal and bureaucratic institutional process.

Learn about the local native people and their customs, values, and beliefs. The expectation of you as a non-native will be that you are disinterested. What a pleasant surprise to find that you keep up with local news through the native newspaper, and value the culture.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to begin with a bit of social chat about reserve business or news. Be sure to select a neutral topic for discussion, you never know who may be a relative of the person before you!

If you use a bit of humor directed at yourself, it also lessens the power differential. Native people are so accustomed to being treated impersonally by authority symbols that to have an authority symbol act humble is often a very novel experience.

Similarly, it helps to have a homey atmosphere in your office, rather than an official-looking and more sterile setting. This is less intimidating and more suggestive of comfort. Plants, nature pictures, momentos add warmth, and native decorations make a public statement which is reassuring.

Try to place the degree of acculturation of the person(s) sitting before you: does the man wear his hair in braids, does he wear a beadwork belt or Indian jewelry? Does the woman have long hair, or a long skirt, or cover her hair? Does she wear only Indian jewelry? Does (s)he speak in the gentle slow rhythm of many native languages, or in the more staccato urban flow? These indicators will give you an initial framework which can be altered later as you learn about the client. (My favourite image about acculturation is a formal portrait I saw in the window of a photography studio: a carefully posed Santa Claus with a young grass dancer in full regalia!)

Eye contact is another indicator of acculturation and again, if natives do not maintain steady, direct eye contact, it is socially acceptable behaviour. It is not rudeness, avoidance or guilt (among the range of interpretations for poor eye contact in the dominant culture). Long, steady, direct eye contact can be seen as provocative. At a meeting where I was the only non-native and there were many empty chairs around a long table, a notoriously angry man entered, passed all the empty chairs to sit directly across from me, and stared at me for two hours, obviously trying to intimidate me.

Make no assumptions that the person with you understands everything you say. In many native cultures, people are too polite to ask for explanations, and they show respect by simply listening to you. The client may also be afraid to let you know that (s)he doesn't understand because you might get angry or think (s)he's stupid. When you ask, "Do you know what I mean?" or "Do you understand why I'm saying this", it provides an opportunity for the student/client to become a participant in the process, to take responsibility for his/her own learning. Often an expression of relief flashes quickly before a verbal response. The answer will often give you insight into "where the person is", into how (s)he perceives your comments. By being included with the opportunity to give feedback, the participant has more control in an active process.

Long silences are all right. Though we were likely all taught that silence is a manifestation of resistance, this does not hold true for native cultures! Silence may be a sign of politeness and respect, of waiting for you to speak. It may also provide thinking time to formulate a response before answering, or translation time to go from English into the native language and back again. Silences are generally very active and productive and need not be cause for alarm.

Match the pacing of the client. If (s)he is a traditional native, likely (s)he will speak in slow pace and a quiet tone. It will feel overpowering if you respond in a loud, urban race of words, and will extinguish the process.

Try not to speak in "jargonese." For people with a life history of having things done to them by people in power, an authoritative counsellor using unintelligible words will widen the gap and increase the feeling of powerlessness. Disempower the counselling process by explaining what you are doing, why, what you expect as the anticipated outcome, etc., in everyday language. Demystify the process and operate as a collaborator rather than as a power figure.

Suspend your value system when asking questions. Remember that the holistic perception may not isolate the beginning and end that you anticipate, or separate out the specific information you seek, because it is all connected. A traditional native may need to "tell a story" as a long narrative simply because that is the way it is. Do not interrupt! It is not up to you to try to eliminate "unnecessary" information. Remember that emotional disturbance is a DIS-ease and the return to harmony and balance may be a slow healing process. Stay with it, and schedule longer appointments if need be. Several native clients specifically requested double appointment times because they preferred the feeling of openness to being boxed in.

If your client's first language was the native language and English was learned in school, validate the command of the English language and your appreciation of the difficulties involved. This conveys that you do not take for granted the effort involved in trying to communicate with you in your language.

As the relationship develops and your collaboration deepens, ask for the meaning of some of the key concepts you are working with, in the native language. The answers will unfold a very different and rich perceptual framework. In Blackfoot, for example, the closest equivalent to the word "wife" would be "partner who should be taken care of." What a wealth of counselling material unfolds!

During the work phase of your collaboration, reflect back what you hear the student say from time to time, to make sure you are both on the same track. This also reassures the student that you do understand and are paying careful attention.

Use imagery, like circles, flowers and other vivid pictures. I perceive my own life as a spiral, like a revolving circle that never returns to exactly the same place, but to the same but different place at a higher, further along, level. This type of image is helpful because it is clear and indicates positive movement and optimism.

Metaphors are helpful, as is the use of humour to lighten some of the intensity of the pain. "It's hard to soar like an eagle when you are surrounded by crows".

Use examples of natives who are known publicly, or examples from your own life. Personal-experience can be helpful in letting the client know that you really do understand because you've been there, too. It is another levelling process, as well. Explore and encourage the use of role models, as a guide for the present situation and for future difficulties. Use stories or native legends if you can relate one to the issues at hand.

Role playing may be helpful. It can feel safer to deal with issues concerning other people when they are removed into a "play" rather than dealing head on because of the need to avoid conflict.

In counselling, eye contact may be a reflection of sexual customs. Women students or clients will be less likely to stare at male counsellors (which might be taken as a sign of sexual forwardness) and would feel uncomfortable if the male counsellor stared at them long and directly.

There are other sexual variables to consider. Men are generally more comfortable with male counsellors and more likely to see them as role models and value what they say. When a female counsellor is doing long term counselling with a male, it may be helpful to involve his partner (with his consent, of course). The female counsellor would then work with and through the couple to help her husband.

For men, who too often have little control over their environment and very low self esteem, jealousy can develop if the partner is seen in ongoing counselling, especially with a male counsellor. The husband may want to join the sessions as a way of controlling the counselling process so that there is no threat to his status-quo. When this occurs, it is up to the counsellor and client to decide whether they want to include him for one session. Sometimes when he is made to feel welcome and observes what actually goes on, his fears are allayed.

Another way of preventing his wife's attendance at counselling is to suddenly need the vehicle for himself, to deal with urgent business quite a distance from the location of the counselling. He may also suddenly take the vehicle for long-put-off repairs that can no longer be put off.

I know one native man who was so threatened by his wife's full time job that he sat in her office all day. In an organization run by a male native, his presence was tolerated!

Females are generally more comfortable with a female counsellor because the sexual dynamic is absent or reduced and often the material that comes up is of a sexual nature, about abuse, etc. The modesty of native women makes it difficult to deal with these issues with a male. The expectation of trusting a man to help with these issues is a tall order.

A male counsellor working with a couple should try to pay specific attention to the wife both for her sake (so that she does not feel unheard), and for the sake of role modelling to her spouse.

Normalize the problem if this is realistic, and provide validation and support that the problem can improve, without making false promises. In cases of deep pathology (like long term family violence), be realistic about the difficulties involved--but be just as realistic about the potential for growth and change.

In long term pathology situations where people drop out and return with new crises repeatedly, it is helpful to express your frustration as an honest sign of caring. As frustration builds up, it will cause you to withdraw emotionally from the client unless you deal with it. If YOU feel frustrated, just imagine how (s)he feels who sits before you! You are free to walk out the door and leave the problem in the room. (S)he walks out the door and takes it everywhere with no escape. Imagine how THAT feels!

To help increase your working patience with long term drop-out-and-return-in-crisis clients, remember two things: They are returning! They see you as a source of help, even if you wonder why! And, picture the person as a flower seed that needs to first send out tentative roots and a delicate shoot reaching up to the sun. Slowly the roots deepen and the stalk strengthens. With nurturance, a bud opens into a magnificant flower.

When dealing with extremely painful emotional content, be careful not to overreact. It is easy to be horrified by some of what we hear, but to express our own shock and horror nakedly will only serve to silence the narration and place one more heavy burden on the person: to protect the counsellor from pain. React with deep caring and support, but show restraint in expression.

Another reason to show restraint is because none of us can predict immediate outcomes. A woman badly beaten by her spouse may want to elicit sympathy for her injuries and condemnation of her spouse. If you give in to your anger at him and allow yourself to side with her by condemning him, you close two potential doors: the possibility that he will ever

come to see you for help; and the likelihood that she will be too embarrassed to continue to see you once she has returned to him. In this situation, the safest course of action is to express your genuine concern about her injuries and suffering and do what you can to help her. Express clear statements about her partner's behaviour as being unacceptable without condemning him as a person. Even if she wants you to, explain clearly why you can't do that, why you reject what he did but cannot condemn <u>him</u>.

Touching is another potential trap. We want to reach over and touch the arm of someone sobbing with pain, we want to place an encouraging hand on the shoulder as (s)he walks out the door. BE VERY CAREFUL! So many native people of both sexes have been physically and sexually abused. To be touched for <u>any</u> reason can feel like a violation and cause immediate increase in anxiety when you are trying to accomplish just the opposite.

Native clients/students may bring a family member with then to an appointment without even thinking about whether or not the person's presence is relevant. We who have been trained to see this as resistance must again swallow hard and throw this idea out the window (again, <u>most</u> of the time). Native families live together, share together and help together. It is not a negative sign for a client to bring a sister or cousin. Take advantage of that person's presence to encourage family support of the counselling work.

With holism in mind, and always trying to ally yourself with the client's strengths, ask "simple" questions like, "What do you need for harmony?", "What do you think you need to feel more in balance again?" You are likely to receive direct responses that will help you both set goals.

As much as possible, try to enhance the concept of responsibility for the client. It is a healing experience to build up a sense of control and empowerment after a lifetime of conditioned powerlessness. Point out choices so that the student can take the responsibility for acting. This will increase the sense of mastery and self-confidence.

Natives are accustomed to seeking advice from elders and may genuinely want and expect advice from you. For us to give it is a counselling "no-no." However, we can do it in a roundabout way: "Have you thought about...?", "People I know have tried...", "Once when I was in this situation, I tried..."

You may want to enquire about whether seeing an elder would be helpful. A young widow I worked with for depression was visibly improved after having a ceremony performed for her deceased husband.

At times, even "homemade" rituals can be effective aids to help a client/student pass through a turning point. The ritual must be individualized to suit the specific person and situation. One to help with loss (through death or divorce) can be adapted from the following ideas. Instruct the client to cut out small paper patterns of clothing, colour them and write the relevant words of pain and separation on them. After being tenderly folded and placed in a tiny box, the package is carefully wrapped and then burned with words of summation and parting. This can be done at home or with the counsellor present. Either way, it can be powerful in freeing long held in emotions.

In summary, what I am saying over and over is deal with the native client as much as possible within the native value system: holism, cooperation, sharing, humour, etc. Natives had no choice about adopting the superficial aspects of the dominant culture. The least we who work with them can do is to try to meet them on their territory. The other consistent message is to demystify the counselling process, disempower the counsellor role and empower and activate the client. Finally, we approach the matter of respect. If you convey respect, the other person will feel that respect and respond. It is as though if you see a bud forming, that bud will open into a more beautiful flower because of the attention you gave it.

Lastly, remember that as in any counselling situation, it is the relationship that counts. Don't lose sight of the person because of the Indian-ness. I know a native woman who has succeeded in the dominant society and has a high degree of education. She identifies three key non-native people in her past who believed in her potential at a time when she was not able to believe in herself. They saw her flower opening up. Their faith in her had a major impact on the direction of her life.

I close with an old Sioux saying, "The longest journey in the world is the journey from head to heart."

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